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### Maturity in Children's Literature

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SHAKEN



Santiago  
Chamorro

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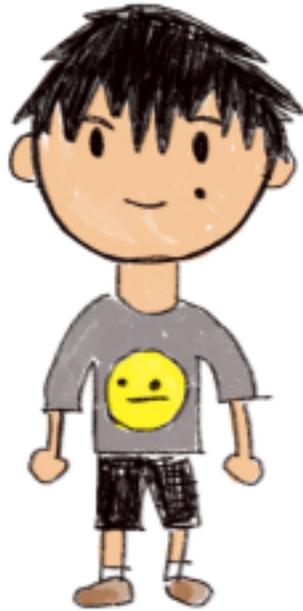
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## CHAPTER 1

Hi. My name is Lucas.

I am eight years, five months, and three weeks old.



My favorite color is sky blue (not normal blue because it is too dark).

My favorite animal is the duck, because they can walk, swim, and fly. I think this is why they are the best animal by far. They can do everything.

I am tall enough to reach the kitchen cabinet without help, and this year I beat my dad in arm wrestling, so I am pretty strong too.

2  
I love reading and writing, so I want to be a writer when I grow up.

But today I'm really, really, reeeeeaaaalllly bored. I'm bored because I am stuck at home because I can't go out. And I can't go out because it's too dangerous.

And it's too dangerous because there have been earthquakes happening.

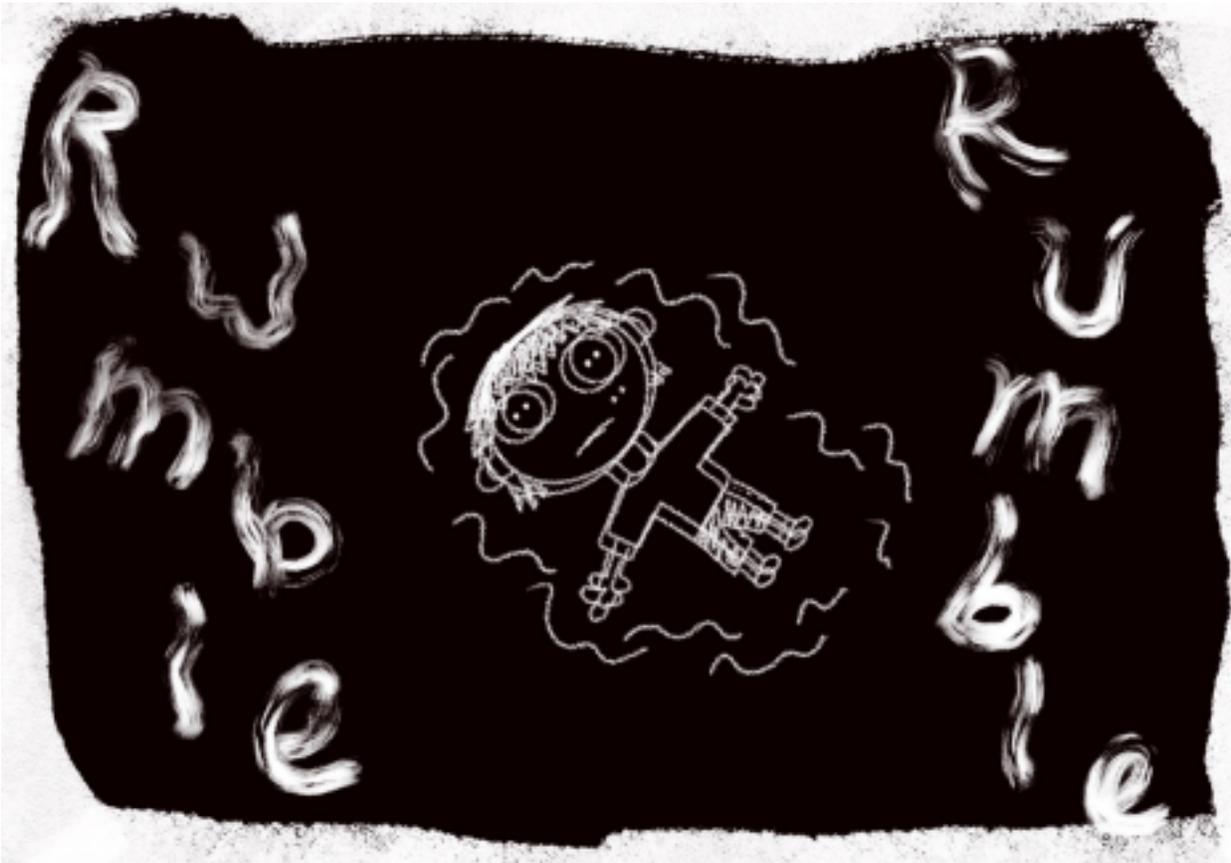
That's right, earthquakes. I can't go to school because of earthquakes. I bet some of you reading this don't know what an earthquake is like. But I've been in earthquakes ever since I was a baby, so I am an expert on them, I think.

But if you don't know what they're like, don't worry. I'll describe them for you just in case.

So earthquakes happen because inside the Earth there are a bunch of big rocks moving around, but we call these rocks plates. Even if these rocks move a teeny tiny bit, an earthquake can happen.

3

It's pretty easy to tell when an earthquake is happening because everything starts shaking. But if you are also a kid and run or play a lot you can get confused and not feel the earthquake happening.



If you don't feel it right away, you might hear it. Earthquakes are very loud. In my house, when an earthquake happens, the windows shake and make this very loud and scary noise. It sounds like when I carry a bunch of plates and they rattle a lot.

4

But the worst part about earthquakes is that they can happen at any time. Even if you are in the bathroom. It happened to Dad once.

They told me at school that if you are in an earthquake you should go outside, away from anything that could hit you. But if you are inside a big building, you should get under a table.

So last week there was a really big earthquake. Really, really

big. My parents say it was a 7.3 earthquake. I'm not sure what it means, but I think it means it was big. I would give it a 10. That's how scary it was.

The power went out when the big earthquake happened. It eventually came back, but it was really scary when it left.

After that the news said that school would be closed for the next couple of days. I was really happy that I didn't need to go to school and that I could play with my friends.

But then we found out that not only the school closed. A lot of things closed down because of the earthquake. This is because it is safer for people to be at home when an earthquake happens, since they are together with their families. Even Dad stopped going to work.

5

But my Mom said that it would also be dangerous to have friends at my house or for me to visit them. I wasn't happy after hearing that. In fact, things quickly got boring at home.

So now I have to stay indoors with my family.

6

## CHAPTER 2

There are five of us in my family. Mom, Dad, my younger brother and my younger sister, and me.

Dad is about twice as tall as me, and we both have black hair. They say that I look a lot like him. I hope that means I will be

as tall as him one day.



Dad works in an office, so I mostly see him at night. Because of the earthquakes he can't go to work at the office, so I'm seeing him very often. It's nice.

7

He loves music and he plays the drums. He even has his own drum set. But, Mom hates loud noises, so he can only play drums in the basement.

He is really nice and he makes everyone in the family laugh. He also cooks the best food in the house.

Mom is also taller than me, and she has short, black hair.



She is a teacher at my school, so I see her very often. She teaches kids younger than me, so she doesn't give me classes. Since she is a teacher she is really good at helping me with school. She can be a bit strict with homework, though.

8

Mom is really smart and she is great with me and my siblings. She always notices when we are sad and talks to us to make us feel better. Since she works at school she is also stuck at home with the rest of the family.

They say that I look like Dad but act just like Mom. That's good because I think Mom is the nicest person I know. She's also a little scary sometimes too, like when I get in trouble. I hope I am not that scary.

My little sister is six years old and she has long hair. Her name is Emilia.



9

Her favorite thing to do is drawing. I think she is pretty good at it. One time she got in trouble for drawing on the house's walls, but I think her pictures looked very nice. Dad took pictures of them before he painted the wall again.

She also loves to talk. Every time my Mom picks us up from school she will speak for the entire ride back home. I usually fall asleep when this happens. When I wake up, she gets mad at me for not listening.

Even though I fight a lot with my sister, I still like to be with her. I'm her older brother after all.

My little brother is four years old. So that means I am twice as old as him. His name is Tony.



10

He is still really small, and he can't talk very well yet. My Mom takes him to a special doctor to help him learn to talk better.

It is difficult for other people to understand him, but everyone in my family knows what he says when he talks.

Like Dad he loves drums. Dad says he will teach him how to play when he's older. He loves playing with Dad's drumsticks. He has hit me in the head with them a few times.

Tony is still really small, so I can't get mad at him. I think that makes me a good older brother.

Since the big earthquake all five of us have been stuck at home for a week. It was fun the first couple of days, but now it's starting to get boring.

We can't go see friends, or play outside, or go to restaurants.

There have also been several small earthquakes since the big one. We call them tremors. We've had a few in the past week. The news says that because of the tremors they don't know when things will go back to normal.

11

Now the news just talks about the earthquakes. They talk about how strong the big one was, and how many houses and buildings it has damaged. I didn't watch the news before, but I watch it with Mom now. Even though I don't really like watching it.

I've been thinking about how much fun I was having outside with my friends last week. It's crazy how all that changed in a few days.

I wonder why things like these must happen?

## CHAPTER 3

Today Dad said that after dinner we would have an "important family meeting." We don't have meetings like this often, so I wondered what it would be about. Maybe he wanted to say that we could finally get a dog?

After dinner, we all stay as Dad clears his throat to make his announcement. He looks a little more serious today.

"Alright, you three," he says, "I know it's been a little difficult and very strange lately, but there's going to be one more big change."

"Is it a dog? Are we getting one?" asks Emilia excitedly.

She had read my mind!

Dad seems to be trying not to smile at the unexpected question.

"No, Emilia, we are not getting a dog," he responds.

"Aww," says Emilia.

13

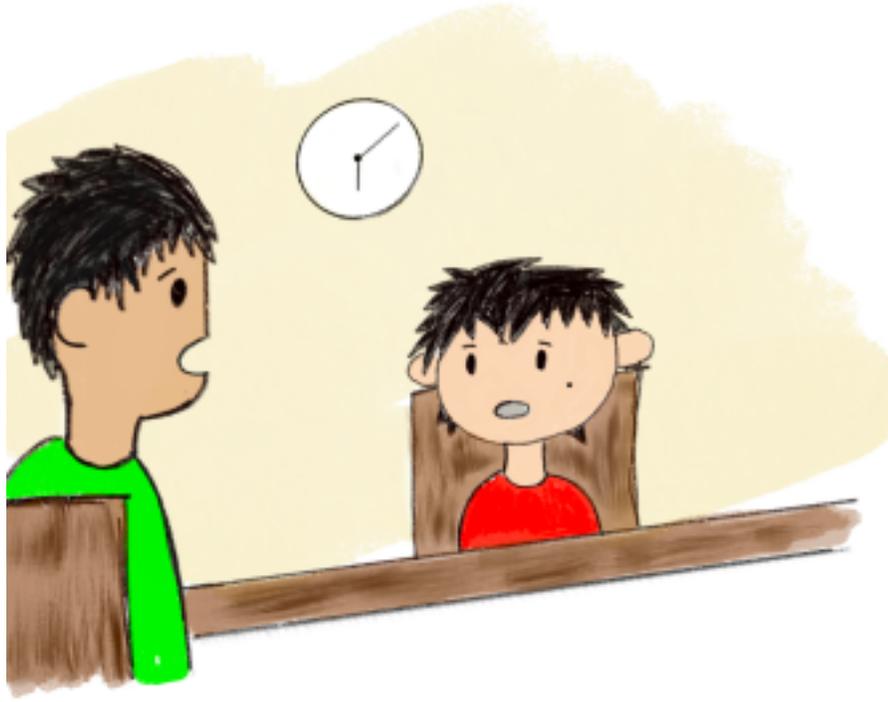
"Look, kids, this is something serious. This might be a little difficult, but it is a bit of an emergency."

I sit up in my chair. This sounds interesting.

"What I want to tell you," says Dad, "is that Grandpa will be living with us now."

"Oh," I think.

"Why?" I ask.



14

"As you kids know, Grandpa is... a special case," says Dad. "He isn't very healthy, so he needs a lot of help to do things like going to the bathroom and moving from place to place."

It was true. Many years ago, back when my Dad was a kid, Grandpa got in a big accident. Because of the accident, he can't walk, so he needs to use a wheelchair. Because of that it became easier for him to get sick, because he got weaker as he got older.

"And as you know," continues Dad, "usually a nurse and Grandma help him out. But your grandma was on a trip, and due to the current situation she can't come back. The nurse that helps him also needs to go home too. So we agreed to take care of your grandpa here."

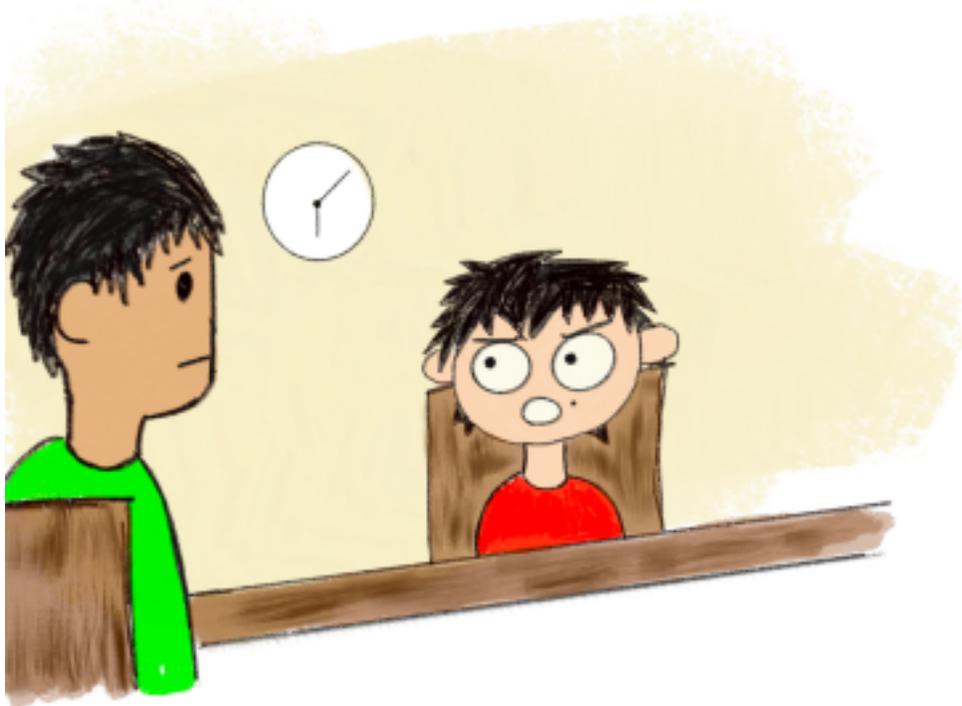
"Oh," I say. "That doesn't sound so bad."

I like Grandpa. Even though he's a little sick and a little quiet, he always listens to me. He's also never scolded me or told me to go away. I also think it's fun when he lets me push him around in his wheelchair.

Dad seems a little relieved that I say that but also a little worried.

15

"There's one more thing," he says. "Grandpa will be sleeping in your room, Lucas."



"What! Why?" I moan. It was already hard enough just being at home, but now they were taking my room? It was so unfair!

"Because your room is closest to ours, honey," says Mom. She was using the gentle voice she used with kids who threw tantrums in her class, which made me angry. I am not a little kid.

16

"If there's an emergency we can go help Grandpa quicker this way," says Mom.

She strokes my back, which was what she usually did to try to make me feel better. But I keep frowning so hard that it hurts. I feel really angry. Not only at Mom and Dad, but also at everything else.

"I don't want to give him my room. This is so unfair," I grumble.

"I know it's tough, buddy," says Dad, "but this is your grandpa; your family. We are in a difficult situation, so we need to stick together. Can you do that for me?"

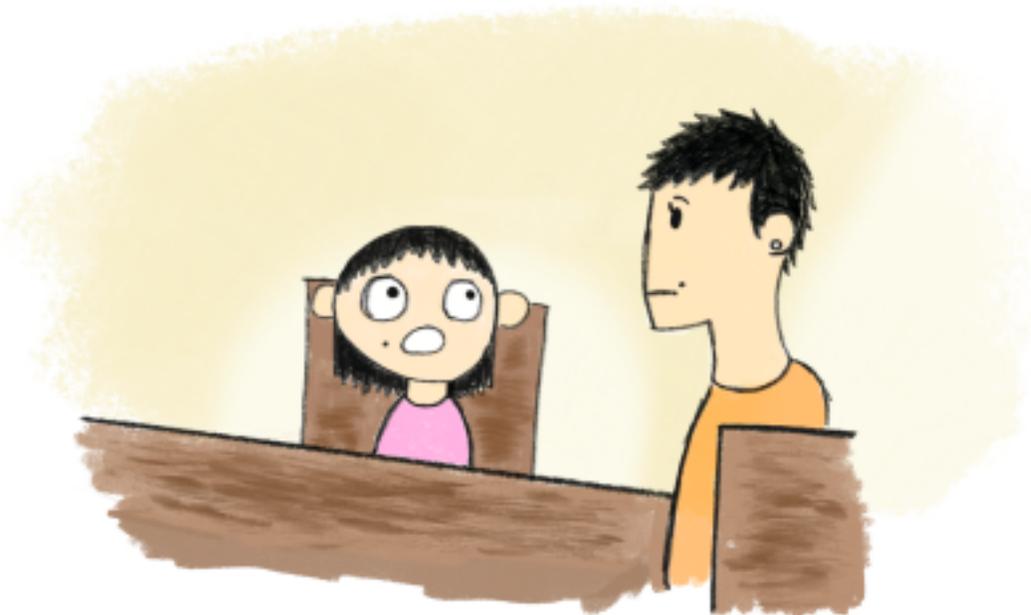
I continue to frown and my face aches. I was still angry, but what Dad said made sense. And that made me angry too.

"Yeah, Lucas," chimes in Emilia, "don't be so whiny."

I got really angry and I was about to say something, but then Mom interrupted me.

"You know this means you will be sharing your room with your brother, right Emilia?"

17



Emilia's face started to wrinkle like mine. It wasn't hard to tell she was beginning to get as angry as me.

18

## CHAPTER 4

"I'm sorry guys," says Dad. "But we need to help Grandpa and we have already made a decision. This is final."

My sister and I keep frowning.

"And please don't get angry about it," says Mom. "If your grandfather sees you like this, he'll get sad. Do you want him to get sad?"

My expression softened a little. No, I didn't want to make Grandpa sad. The problem was I didn't want to be sad either. Now I was angry *and* confused.

I wonder why things like this must happen?

"When is he taking away my room?" I grumble.

"Grandpa's nurse is going back home tomorrow, so tomorrow afternoon," says Dad.

"What?" I groan. "Tomorrow? Why didn't you tell us sooner?"

19

"Does it make any difference?" asks Dad. His voice sounds a little stern.

"Well," I say carefully, "it would've been nice to know a little sooner."

"Well," says Dad, "it was a big decision, so we only agreed until now. I know this is hard, bud, but sometimes things in life happen when you least--"

**RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE.**

All of the sudden the floor starts to shake and the windows rattle.

A tremor!

We all freeze for less than a second.

And then with not a single word being spoken, Mom grabs Tony, and we all duck under the dinner table.

The floor trembles and I hear the whole house shake. It feels as if we were on top of a giant washing machine.

20

And then, as quickly as it had started, it was over.

We all look at each other and get up from the table. Nobody says anything. We speak with our eyes about how scary that had been.

The house seemed intact, almost as if we had all imagined the tremor. Not even the glasses of water on the table were split.

Finally, Dad speaks:

"Like I was saying, sometimes things happen when you least expect them."

## CHAPTER 5

After the meeting, our parents sent us to bed, but said I had to sleep in Emilia's room. They said that they needed my bed out so that they could start rearranging my room to get ready for Grandpa.

I complained that all my stuff was in my room, but they said I could go pick anything I needed anytime I wanted. I felt a bit relieved, but I still felt mostly upset.

My room had been taken from me before I even realized it.

"But what if Grandpa is using the room or sleeping in it?" I ask.

"Don't worry, I'm sure your grandfather won't mind," says Dad. "And it's okay even if he's sleeping. Grandpa is a really heavy sleeper. When I was a kid it took me and one of my brothers to shake him awake."

"Really?" I say.

22

"Yeah. He sleeps like a rock," says Dad, smiling. "But you don't need to shake him awake, alright?" he adds quickly.

"Okay..." I say. My parents are very good at preventing me from doing fun stuff as soon as I think about doing it.

My Dad and I move my bed into Emilia's room.

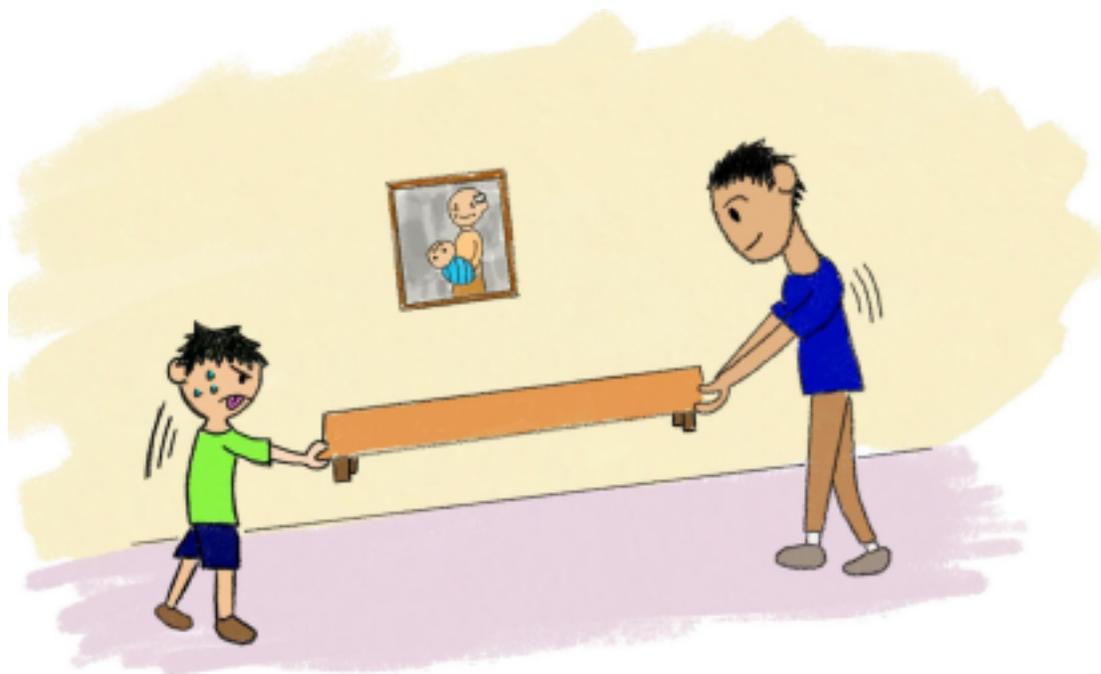
"Thanks for helping with the heavy lifting," says Dad.

"No problem," I say.

"Is this too heavy?" he asks.

"No," I say.

Well, I say that, but actually it *is* a little heavy. But it's nothing I can't handle.



"Wow, man, it's pretty heavy for me," he says. "Guess you'll be stronger than me soon."

"Maybe," I say. I smiled for the first time since the meeting had ended. I'm still angry, but Dad is just too good at making me smile when I'm mad.

"Tony is so lucky," I say. "He doesn't need to switch rooms."

"Well," says Dad. "He does sleep in my room with your mom

and I. So now everyone is sharing rooms."

"I guess," I mumble. "Still lucky, though."

24

We set the bed down in Emilia's room. It is a little bit cramped, but the bed fits. Emilia and I can still move around the room. Dad has a little trouble moving around, though, since he is so big.

Emilia watched the whole thing from her doorway.

She did *not* look happy.

"What's wrong Emilia?" asks Dad.

"There's no room left," she mumbles.

"Yes there is," says Dad. "And it's only for the nights. Your brother doesn't need to be here during the day."

"What?" I ask, surprised. "Then where am I going to go?"

"You can still use your room," says Dad.

"What about Grandpa?" I ask.

"Grandpa will enjoy the company. Also, it's better if we have someone watching over him just in case."

25

I don't know how to feel about this. I give Dad a worried look.

"Alright you two, come here," he says.

We walk over to him and he puts a hand on each of our shoulders.

"I know this is a little tough, but I need you to know how important this is. If you do this, you aren't only helping Grandpa. You're helping me, my siblings, and your grandma. You are helping your whole family. Because if you do this, all the people who are worried about Grandpa will also feel better. Do you understand?"

We nod. I still don't like it, but I think I understood.

"Alright, you two. Go to bed, alright?" says Dad. We

both put on our PJs and go to bed.

I have trouble going to sleep. I toss and turn around wondering if I would ever get my room back.

"Stop moving so much!" hisses my sister.

26

"Mean," I think to myself.

I settle down and eventually fall asleep.

## CHAPTER 6

The next morning, when I went to grab some stuff in my room there was another bed in there.

"Is that Grandpa's bed?" I ask.

"Yep," says Dad. "We had a spare bed frame, and I got a new mattress for Grandpa."

The new bed makes my room feel a little smaller. 27

"Was it heavy?" I ask. "I would have helped if you had told me. I'm pretty strong after all."

I flex my arm and pat my muscles to show Dad how serious I was.

Dad laughs and ruffles my hair. I don't like getting my hair messed up, but if it's okay only if Dad does it.

"Thanks, but it's okay," he says. "It was so light that even I could put it in there on my own."

I look at the bed.

"Can I try lifting it up?" I ask.

"Nope," says Dad. "It's positioned perfectly for Grandpa, so don't move it."

"Okay," I say.

"Alright," he says. "Go get ready. Your grandfather will be here any minute now."

28

We all went to get ready. A few minutes later Dad got a call on his phone.

"He's here!" he says after hanging up.

He went out and we all waited inside.

A few seconds later, he wheeled Grandpa in.

29

My grandfather is seventy-one years old.

His hair and eyes are gray, and his face and hands are wrinkly. I like his wrinkles because he lets me play with the ones he has on his arms when I am with him.

Grandpa is the father of my dad and my dad's four other siblings. He had three daughters and two sons including Dad.

When Dad was about five years old Grandpa got into a big

accident that left him in a wheelchair. Since he has been

30

pushing himself with a wheelchair for a long time, Grandpa has skinny legs but very strong arms.

The wheelchair he uses is black and it has big rubber tires. I've never seen Grandpa without his wheelchair. The only times I see him out of it are when he is in bed, but even then I know the wheelchair is nearby.

Since Grandpa is always sitting down I'm almost as tall as him. But Dad says that if he could stand up he'd be really tall, maybe even taller than him.

I wish I could see that.

As he rolls in, Mom tells us to go say hi to him.

Emilia and I both give him a hug at the same time, as usual. I recognize the smell of his cologne when I get close. It's the same one Dad wore whenever he went to any fancy work events.

"Hello... kids. How... are you?" says Grandpa. His voice is slow and raspy and warm.

31

Grandpa then turns to face Mom. She crouches a little to give him a kiss on the cheek.

"Hello, Mr. Francisco," she says. "Did you have a nice trip coming here?"

"Yes..." says Grandpa. "Thank you... for having me here... Mary. It's lovely... to see you and the kids... again."

"What about me Dad?" asks Dad.

"Sure..." says Grandpa. "Why not?"

Dad laughs.

"Alright," he says. "Let's get you to your room." I

feel my chest tighten a little. It is *his* room now.

Mom sees my scrunched up face.

"Francis, Lucas here will help you settle down while we go get lunch ready. Does that sound good?"

"Huh?" I think.

32

"Sure..." smiles Grandpa. "Why don't we ...go talk for a bit... Grandson?"

33

**CHAPTER 7**

I open the door, and Grandpa is already in his new bed. It's weird to see somebody just laying down in the place I usually slept in.

My nightstand now had a bunch of different medicine bottles on top of it instead of my books.

Even the room smells different. I can only smell Grandpa's cologne and disinfectant. I guess Mom had cleaned it before Grandpa arrived. I don't really like it.

Even though it had just been a day since I stopped using it, these changes made my room feel different.

It makes it feel like my room isn't really mine anymore.

I want to turn around and leave. I don't feel like talking to Grandpa anymore.

Just then I hear the door creak a little and turn to see Mom standing there.



"Go talk to him," she whispers. "Don't wanna," I mumble.

I really don't wanna. I decide I'm going to stand my ground and leave, no matter what.

But now, Mom gives me *the Look*.

I'm sure that at some point one of your parents has given you *the Look*. And when they give you *the Look*, you usually do what they ask you to do. Or else.

"Okaaay..." I grumble.

"Alright, I'll go get the both of you when it's time to eat," says Mom. "Love you."

"Uh-huh," I say.

Mom stays there without moving.

"Love youuuuuuu," she repeated.

I sigh.

36

"Love you too," I mumble.

The door closed and walked over to Grandpa who turned to me.

"Lucas... my boy... how are you?" he asks in a voice which is half a whisper. "It's good to see you... Why don't you come here and talk with Grandpa?"

I walk over to his bed and sit on the very edge of it.

"Hi, Grandpa," I say.

Grandpa frowns a little. He looks at me a little more confused

than usual.

"Come on, get closer... so Grandpa can... give you a hug," he says.

I get closer and then he pulls me towards him and gives me a hug. He also gives me a kiss on my forehead. His beard is scratchy and his lips are wet.

37

When he finishes hugging me I wipe my forehead with my hand and sit on the bed.

Grandpa continues to lay down stares at the ceiling. His breathing is loud and it fills the room.

We stay quiet for a while. I don't feel like starting the conversation, so I wait for Grandpa to start.

But the only response I get from him is his breathing. So I

wait.

And wait.

And...



"Huh?" mumbles Grandpa. "Oh, it was... good... it was good."

More silence.

"Uh..." I manage, "and who drove you here?"

"Your... uh, your... father did," he responds.

I knew this, but I asked because I wanted to keep the conversation going.

And now the conversation is over.

I start to think of an excuse so I can leave the room. This is too awkward.

39

"So..." says Grandpa (finally). "How are you doing at school? Still getting good grades?"

I sigh, a little annoyed. There's no school obviously.

"Yeah, I guess." I say. "But I'm not having school right now, because of all the earthquakes and stuff. They say it's too dangerous, you know?"

Grandpa's frowns, making his eyebrows get all scrunched together. He does that when he is extra confused.

He does that a lot.

"Earthquakes?" Grandpa asks.

I roll my eyes but I try to stay patient.

"Yeah, you know, earthquakes," I say. "When the ground

shakes a lot and it's really scary?"

Grandpa closes his eyes and thinks for a moment.

"Ah... yes..." he says. "There was one... recently, wasn't there?"

40

"Yeah," I say. "There's been a bunch. Haven't you noticed them?"

"Well..." he says. "I think... I slept through them."

"What?" I think.

"What?" I say. I was both surprised and trying not to laugh.

"Well... you know," he says, smiling a little. "Our family... is made of quite heavy sleepers," he says.

"Yeah!" I say, smiling a little bit myself. "Dad's the same. We need at least two people to wake him up."

Grandpa laughs a little. It nearly sounds like a cough.

"It seems... that your father hasn't changed in that regard," he says. "When he was a boy... he'd never get up... to go to school. It drove your grandma... crazy... very crazy."

I laugh a little.

But there is something that is bothering me.

41

"But Grandpa," I say. "Isn't it dangerous to sleep through earthquakes? What if there's a really big one?"

Grandpa smiles softly and points at his legs.

"Then..." he says, "there isn't much I can do... with my health and age... That's why... I'm so grateful that I'm here... and that you'll take care of me."

"Huh," I think. Grandpa is right. It's better if we are here, just in case. It makes me feel a little silly for being mad at him for taking my room. I still am, but now I feel a little... guilty?

Just then, Mom opens the door.

"Foods ready, you two," she says. "Grandpa, I'll help you off the bed in a minute."

"Thank you..." says Grandpa.

"Yes!" I think to myself. Now I don't need to have any awkward conversations with Grandpa anymore.

42

Mom sees me smiling.

"Don't worry," she says, "you two can finish your conversation after we eat!"

"No!" I think.

## CHAPTER 8

And so a week went by with me having an awkward conversation with Grandpa every day. Each lasted about an hour.

I tried to think about things to talk with Grandpa about, but it was really difficult. Grandpa doesn't talk a whole lot, so I don't know a lot about what he likes.

Yesterday I tried to ask him.

I said, "Grandpa, what kind of stuff do you like to do?"

43

"Hrm?" he replied.

"What do you like to do?" I asked again. A little slower this time.

"Oh..." he said. "What I like... Let me see... let me see..."

Grandpa closed his eyes and I saw his forehead wrinkle even more than usual.

And so I waited for an answer.

And waited.

And waited.

And then—

44

Granda let out a big snore.



He had fallen asleep!

Today, Mom is asking me again to go make company for him. But this time, I'm complaining.

"I don't wanna go anymore," I say. "He fell asleep last time!"

"Aw, sweetie," says Mom. "Your Grandpa is at an age where he gets really tired. And with his health, he can't really help it."

"But that was—!" I say. "That was— that was—"

45

"That was what?" asks Mom.

"That was *unprofessional!*"

My Mom gives me a look that says that she is trying her hardest not to laugh. Did I use the word wrong? It makes me really, really frustrated.

"What's so funny?" I ask. "I used the word right!" "You did, you did," says Mom, trying to calm me down. "See?" I say.

"That's why I'm not going to talk to him today!"

"Okay," says Mom. "How about this: today you can just hang out with Grandpa. You don't need to talk with him. You can do something else, but you need to do it in the same room as Grandpa."

I give Mom a look.

"That's it?" I ask.

"That's it," she says. "But if he talks to you, you need to talk back," she added quickly.

46

"I don't know..." I say.

She put her hands on my shoulders.

"Please, honey, do it for Mom," she says. "Even if you don't talk to him, it's good for someone to keep Grandpa company."

"I don't even know what I want to do there," I mumble.

"Let's see..." says Mom. "How about you draw?"

Drawing? That didn't sound too bad...

"Fine," I say. "But only for a little while."

"Perfect!" says Mom. "And show him what you drew when you finished! That's part of our deal."

"Fiiiiiiiiine," I reply.

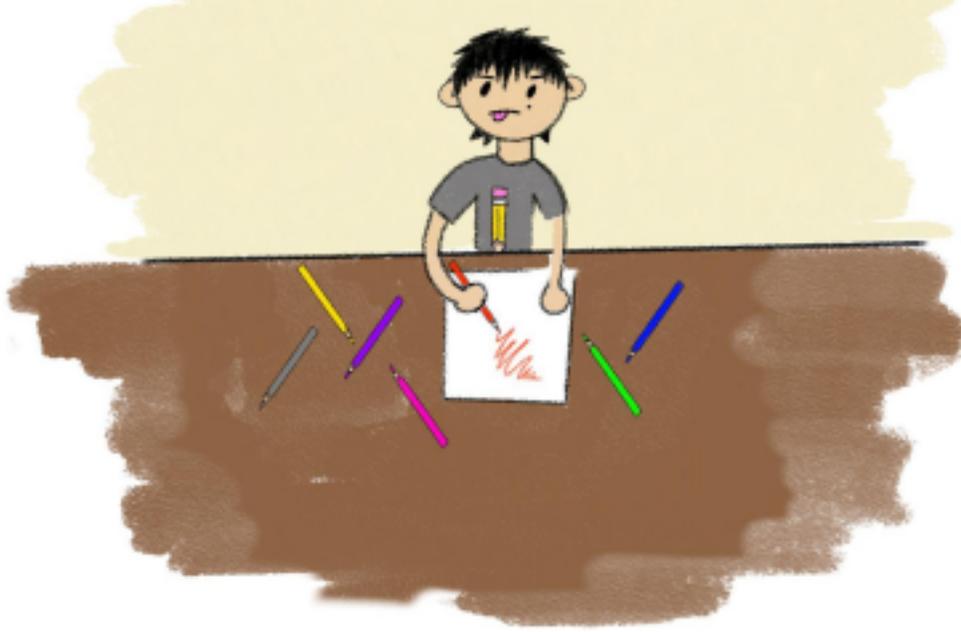
Before I knew it, Mom had put some paper and a box of colored pencils in my hands, and then pushed me into Grandpa's room.

47

I walk in and Grandpa sees me.

"Hi, Grandpa," I say. "I'm just gonna sit in here and draw for a bit. Is that okay?"

"Hrm?" he says. "Oh... yes, of course you can."



aper.

' as possible.

And so I start drawing. My pencils race across the paper. A little bit of red here. Some blue here. Green right there. And then here some purple. And some pink over here, why not?

48

I keep drawing and drawing until the sharp points of the pencils are gone.

After a few finishing touches, I lift up my masterpiece, and—

It is a complete mess. How could a drawing with so much color be so... boring?

49

Oh, well. Time to try again. Maybe it'll be better if I use some more color.

And then—

“Did you finish... your drawing?”

It's Grandpa.

"Yes," I say quietly.

"Let... me see it," says Grandpa.

Uh oh. I don't want Grandpa to see this mess. But I had made a deal with Mom...

I walk over the bed and show him my drawing. I feel a little embarrassed.

"Hmmm..." says Grandpa as he carefully studies the page. "It's not very good," I say.

"It certainly has..." says Grandpa, "a lot of color..." 50

"Yeah," I say. "I thought if I used all the colors it would look good."

"Hmmm..." says Grandpa. "Do you have a pencil with an eraser?"

"Huh?" I say. What is he talking about?

"A pencil... with an eraser... Like the ones you have at school... Could you please give me one?" he asks.

"Sure," I say.

I walk over to my desk, grab a pencil, and bring it to him.

"Would you mind... if I draw on your drawing?" asks Grandpa.

Usually, I'd say no, but I was curious about what Grandpa wanted to do.

"Sure," I say as I hand him the paper. "It's ruined anyway."

"No..." says Grandpa. "It's not ruined at all..."

Grandpa then puts the paper on his lap, and starts rubbing the pencil's eraser on top of it. As he does, bits of color on the paper start fading away.

51

He rubs, and I watch curiously as he does it.

And a few minutes later, he lifts the paper and shows it to me.

52

Grandpa had fixed the drawing!

"That's so cool!" I say. "How did you know how to do that?"

Grandpa smiles.

"With art..." he says, "Having a little bit of no color is as important as having a lot of color. That's why white is such an important tool for painters."

53

"What?" I ask. "But white is so boring!"

Grandpa laughs his raspy laugh.

"Yes..." he agrees. "White is boring... But white is what makes all the other colors shine and have meaning."

He hands me the new and improved drawing.

"Without something boring like white, there would be no happy face in this drawing."

"So without boring things..." I say, "Fun things wouldn't be as fun?"

Grandpa nods.

"Something like that," he says.

I look at Grandpa and smile.

"Thanks for showing me this Grandpa! I'm gonna try to make more drawings like this."

I rush to my desk and start to draw more.

54

Maybe hanging out with Grandpa isn't so bad. 55

## **CHAPTER 9**

I soon discovered that talking with Grandpa is pretty fun, if you know how to do it.

I figured out that if I ask him the right questions, I can get him to talk.

Grandpa seems to have trouble paying attention to things. But, if I ask the right question, his eyes light up, and he starts talking with me for a good while.

"Grandpa, what is your favorite animal?"

"Grandpa, what kind of music do you listen to?"

"Grandpa, what was Dad like as a kid?"

Specific questions like this helped me learn a lot about my Grandpa.

I learned that he traveled to Africa to do research on his favorite animal, the elephant. He was in charge of making drawings of elephants for books. No wonder he knows so much about drawing!

56

I also learned that he loves to listen to rock music, which surprised me. I thought he would like other stuff, like classic music, or something.

He told me that he loved listening to rock music with Dad. In fact, that was what got Dad into playing the drums!

Grandpa says that Dad always loved playing drums since he was a little kid. He says that it drove Grandma crazy, but Grandpa thought it sounded great!

57

It was really difficult to talk to Grandpa a couple of weeks ago, but now I think that it's pretty fun! It's like a game where I try to figure out what kind of questions to ask him.

Today I had a great question prepared for Grandpa: I was going to ask him to draw a picture of an elephant for me.

I open the door, and see Grandpa staring at the ceiling like usual.

"Hi, Grandpa!" I say.

He slowly turns to look at me and smiles.

"Hello..." he says. "How are you?"

"Good, good," I reply as I get on his bed and sit next to him.

I place a pad of paper and a pencil on top of Grandpa's belly.

"Hey, Grandpa," I say. "Could you please draw me a picture of

an elephant for me?"

Grandpa stares at the paper, looking a little confused.



rica."

ing a few

I look away. I want to wait a couple of minutes and then look

at the finished drawing. I want to keep how the drawing will look as a surprise to myself.

59

And so I wait.

Wait.

And wait.

And suddenly—

"I'm..." says Grandpa. "I'm done... I think."

I turn around, excited to see Grandpa's drawing. I grab it and take a look—

60

"Oh," I think.

"It's...." Grandpa says. "It's not very good... is it?"

Grandpa looks a little sad, and I don't know what to say.

We stay quiet for a long while.

Even though I'm used to these pauses with Grandpa, I didn't like this one.

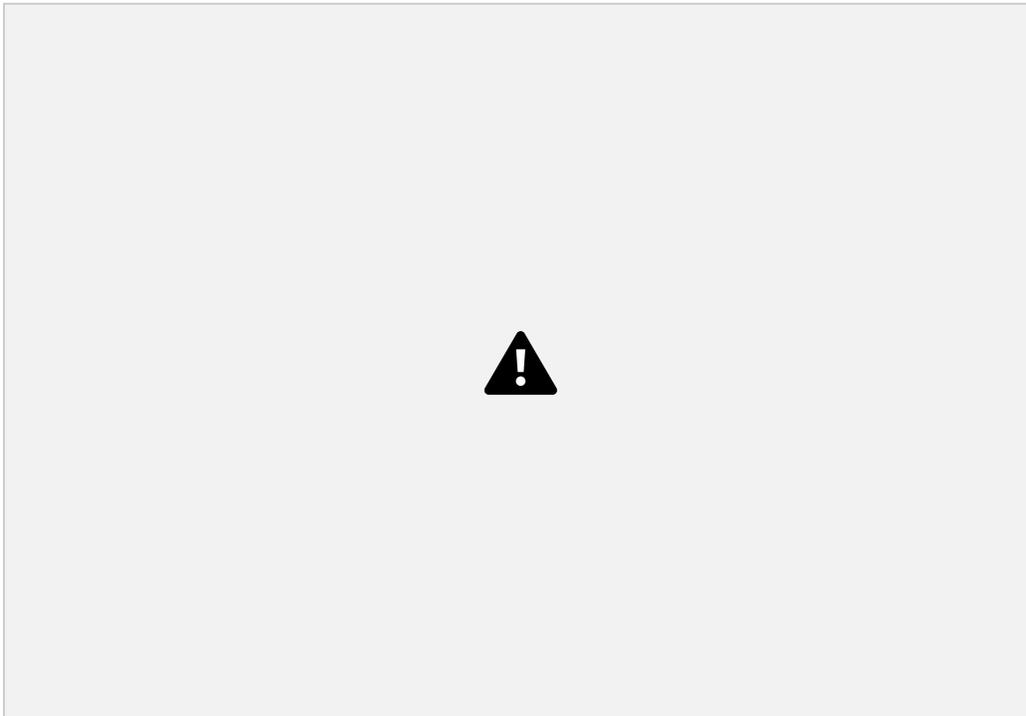
"Well..." I finally manage to say. "I, um, think it's nice Grandpa."

"Well..." says Grandpa. "You... can keep it..."

Grandpa's voice sounds a little different. A little more serious, I think.

"I'm..." says Grandpa. "I'd like to be alone, now... So... you can leave now... Go."

61



This is the first time Grandpa has asked me to leave his room.

It stings a little.

"Okay..." I say. "Bye, Grandpa."

I leave and quietly close the door behind me.

Grandpa doesn't look back.

62

## CHAPTER 10

I go to the living room's sofa clutching my Grandpa's drawing and lay down. It's really the only place I can go now, since I don't have a room.

All of the sudden I start feeling the anger of having lost my room. But I'm feeling more worried about Grandpa.

A couple of weeks ago, I would've been glad to have such a short conversation with Grandpa.

So why am I feeling so sad now?

Suddenly, I see Dad's face peering over me.

"Hey, buddy," he says. "What's up with the long face?" I sit up.

"Grandpa kicked me out of his room," I say.

Saying it aloud somehow makes me feel even sadder. 63

"Really?" asks Dad. "Did you do something?"

He doesn't sound angry as he asks the question.

"I asked him to draw an elephant for me..." I say as I hand him the drawing.

Dad takes it and stares at it for a bit.

"Ah," he says. "So that's it."

Dad then sits next to me and puts his hand on my shoulder.

"Look," says Dad, "my Dad— your Grandpa— is an amazing person. Not only because he was a great artist, but also because he is a strong person. But you know that, right?"

I nod my head.

"But," continues Dad, "he's also very sick. I know you know that he can't walk, but he's a little sicker than you realize. An accident like the one your Grandpa had, well, it's something that you have to live with for the rest of your life."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

64

"What I mean is," continues Dad, "is that as your Grandpa gets older, some things get a little hard for him to do."

"Like drawing?" I ask.

"Yes," says Dad. "Your Grandpa loved to draw, but now with his health, it's really hard for him to do it anymore. And as time goes on, some other things will get harder for him, like talking for example."

My eyes widened. Was that why Grandpa was such a slow talker?

"I think," says Dad, "that you asking him for the drawing made him remember that. And that made him a little sad, so that's why he wanted to be alone."

I suddenly feel awful. I just wanted to see Grandpa draw, that's all.

"I..." I say, my voice shaking a little. "I didn't mean to make Grandpa sad."

65

Dad starts to rub my shoulders, which is what he usually does to comfort me.

"I know, buddy," he says. "I know. But that's another thing that makes your Grandpa amazing. Despite all of that he has been a loving father and grandfather to all of our family. Right?"

I nod.

"All I want you to know," he says, "Is that even if your Grandpa is very sick, and that makes him sad— he'll still love you. Okay?"

I wipe away a couple of tears.

"Okay," I reply.

I didn't have any talks with him for the next couple of days.

Part of it was because whenever I came to his room Grandpa was sleeping. Or pretending to sleep. I don't know.

But the real reason is because I was scared. I didn't want to accidentally make him sad again.

Today I'm standing in front of Grandpa's door today wondering if I should go in or not.

"Are you going to talk with Grandpa today?" someone asks.

I turn around and see Mom behind me.

"I don't know," I say. "Maybe he's asleep."

"He isn't," she says. "I brought him some water, right now. He's awake."

67

Suddenly I feel really nervous. Why am I so scared? It's just Grandpa.

"Why don't you go?" asks Mom. "Are you scared?"

It always surprises me whenever Mom reads my mind. I guess it's a thing parents can do.

"You know," says Mom. "Your Grandpa also kind of scared me too."

"Really?" I ask. I can't see anyone being scared of Grandpa.

"Really," says Mom, smiling. "When I first met him, I thought he was a very serious person. I barely saw him smile, so I was a bit nervous around him."

"Are you still scared of him?" I ask.

"Not one bit," she answered, still smiling.

"Why?"

"Because of you," says Mom, poking my chest. "Just after you were born, I came to visit your Grandpa so I could introduce you to him. And when he saw you— guess what happened?"

68

"What?"

"He smiled the biggest smile I've seen from him! I couldn't believe that such a serious man could smile like that! When he held you for the first time, it was the happiest I'd seen him."

I'm surprised to hear this, but also happy.

"Look," says Mom, "your Grandpa has had a difficult life. One

which would make anyone put on a serious face. But when he sees you kids, he smiles. You make him happy."

Mom grabs my shoulders and points me towards Grandpa's door.

"That's why you shouldn't be scared of him," she says. "And that's why you should make up with him."

I still feel a little nervous, but I understand.

I want to talk with him.

"Thanks, Mom," I say.

And then, I open the door.

69

I stand in the room, and see Grandpa sitting on the bed.

He's awake.

Suddenly it feels really difficult to move or talk.

It's just Grandpa, but I'm still scared.

I try to remember what Mom and Dad told me about Grandpa.

It must be true. Right?

"Hi, Grandpa..." I finally start to say.

But then—

RUMBLE, RUMBLE, RUMBLE

A tremor!

I panic. I don't know what to do.

70

But I suddenly find myself running towards Grandpa.

And I hug him.

And he hugs me back.

Tightly.

We hold each other as the tremor continues.

And then the tremor stops. Just as quickly as it had started.

Suddenly I start to cry. I cry because I was so scared that something could have happened to us.

And Grandpa rubs my back, the same way my Mom does when

I'm upset.

"It's okay..." he says. "It's okay..."

I keep crying, but I don't feel sad.

I cry but I understand that I love my Grandpa. Even if he's sick. Even if he took my room. Even if he's mad at me. And even if a tremor is happening.

71

And I understand that he also loves me too.

No matter what.



## CHAPTER 12

It's been two weeks since Grandpa and I made up. Because of that tremor, school has not started yet. But that's okay.

Today I'm going to talk with Grandpa again.

I carefully open the door and find my grandfather in bed.

I can see the shape of my grandfather's thin legs under the bedsheets. I'm so used to seeing my grandfather in bed that I could probably recognize him just by the shape of his legs under sheets or blankets.

He lays there with both of his wrinkly hands on top of his belly. He's staring at the ceiling.

Grandpa then turns his head and looks at me. The wrinkles in his mouth move to make a small smile.

"Lucas, my boy, how are you?" he says in a voice which is half a whisper. "It's good to see you... Why don't you come here and... talk with Grandpa?"

I go over to the bed and lay by his side like usual. I also put

my hands in my belly the same way he does.

Grandpa sits up a bit.

"Here... get closer so I can give you a hug," says Grandpa.

I get up and crawl a bit to his side. He lifts one of his arms and wraps them around my shoulders. He pulls me close to his chest and we hug. His hugs feel tighter than you'd expect from an old guy like him. But I don't mind.

He then gives me a kiss on my forehead. I can feel a little bit of his beard scratch my head as he does it. It is a very familiar feeling, so I don't mind it either.

After we finish hugging, we both lay back down.

I wipe my forehead with my forearm.

74

Grandpa lays back down and continues to stare at the ceiling. His breathing is a bit loud, as usual. But I like how it sounds.

"What are you looking at Grandpa?" I ask.

"The ceiling," he responds.

I look up. I see the same boring ceiling I used to see every night.

"Why?" I ask.

"Because I think it's... interesting," he responds.

"Even the most boring things can catch my Grandpa's attention," I think.

"Why?" I ask aloud.

"Because..." says Grandpa. "In my home... I'm always laying down... and I see the same ceiling all day. Seeing yours... Is very interesting... compared to mine."

I look up and study the ceiling.

75

"I guess it has some cool cracks in it," I say.

"Right?" says Grandpa.

"That one looks like lightning, and that one looks like tree roots," I say.

Grandpa scratches his chin and squints his eyes.

"Yeah..." he says. "You're right."

He lifts his wrinkled hand and rests it on my head and rubs it. Grandpa is the other person apart from Dad that I don't mind messing with my hair.

"You are... so creative," he says. "Are you going... write about cracks like these... in one of your books... when you grow up?" he asks while laughing a little.

"Maybe," I say.

We stay quiet for a minute. Usually when I can't come up with something to talk about it feels really awkward, but it doesn't feel that way with Grandpa anymore.

76

"I wonder if we got these cracks because of the earthquakes," I say out loud.

"Perhaps..." responds Grandpa. "But... I doubt it... this is a sturdy house..."

"Yeah," I say. "I guess our house is pretty good."

"Yes..." says Grandpa. "After that... big earthquake... years ago... people in this country... have built better houses... to keep us safe..."

Huh? I don't remember this earthquake.

"Which earthquake was this?" I ask. "Was it long ago?"

Grandpa scratches his chin and begins thinking.

"We had a really... big one. Back then... before your father was born," he says.

"Wow," I say. "That was a long time ago. Was it scarier than this one?"

Grandpa closes his eyes to think.

77

"Yes..." he says. "Very scary... It was so strong... Some of our shelves fell... even our refrigerator."

Wow.

Our earthquake was scary, but this one sounded terrifying.

"What happened later?" I ask him.

Grandpa continues to think.

"Hmmm... I think we had to sleep outside... for a while. We were... afraid of another big one... happening in our sleep."

"Did any buildings fall down?" I ask.

"Yes... But that was... far away from us... near the capital. That's where the earthquake was the strongest," he says.

"And then what happened?" I ask.

Grandpa opens his eyes and smiled.

"We rebuilt anything that... broke... and lifted every refrigerator that... fell. It was a difficult time... but all our

78  
family was... safe. And then a year later... when everything was fixed... we had your father."

He rubs my head again.

"It was a wonderful gift..." he says. "To have your father after such a difficult time. And then... we were fortunate enough... to receive more gifts as time went on..."

I sat up, curious. What else could be as wonderful as Dad?

"What kind of gifts?" I ask.

"You, silly," responds Grandpa.